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BIOGRAPHY

OF

MRS. CATHERINE BABINGTON,

THE ONLY

WOMAN MASON IN THE WORLD,

AND HOW SHE BECAME A

BLUE LODGE MASON,

BY

J. P. BABINGTON.

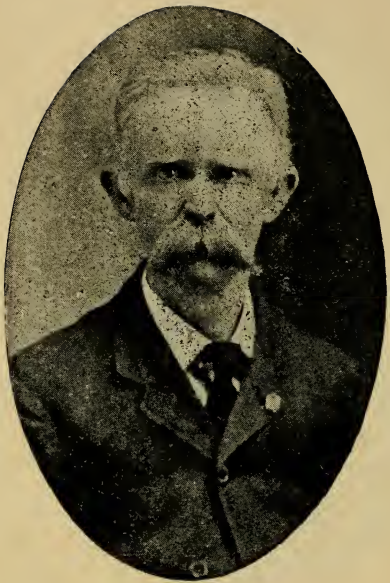
THIRD EDITION.

PUBLISHED AND FOR SALE BY

J. P. BABINGTON,

TAYLORSVILLE, N. C.

Mrs. Catherine Babington.



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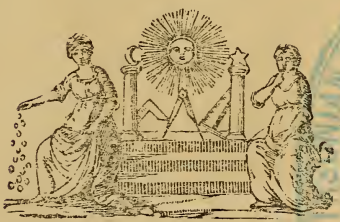

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J. P. BABINGTON,

TAYLORSVILLE. N. C.

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Certificate from Lee Lodge, No. 253, A. F. & A. M.

ANCIENT, FREE AND ACCEPTED MASONS. TO ALL MASTER MASONS TO WHOM THESE PRESENTS SHALL COME—GREETING:

Hall of Lee Lodge, No. 253. This is to Certify, that Brother J. P. Babington is at the date of these presents, a Master Mason, in good and regular standing, and has paid all dues and is free from all charges, and is a member of Lee Lodge, working under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of North Carolina.

Given under my hand and the seal of the Lodge at Taylorsville. this 29th, day of November, A. D. 1906, A. L. 5906.

A. C. PAYNE, Secretary.

Certificate from Cleveland Lodge, No. 202, A. F. & A. M.

To All Free and Accepted Masons on the Face of the Globe, Greeting:

We do hereby certify that our worthy Brother, J. P. Babington, who has signed his name in the margin hereof has been regulary Initiated, Passed and Raised and that he is now a member of Cleveland Lodge, No. 202, located at Shelby, Cleveland County, North Carolina. Distinguished for his zeal and fidelity to the Craft, as such we do hereby recommend him to all Brothers wheresoever dispersed. In testimony whereof we have granted this certificate under our hands and the Seal of the Lodge this the 15th, day of July, A. D. 1881. A. L. 5881.

T. D. LATTIMORE, W. M.
R. McBRAYER, S. W.
B. B. BABINGTON, J. W.
J. C. GIDNEY, Secretary.

1906,
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J. P. BABINGTON,
BOWLING GREEN, VA.

1912,
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J. P. BABINGTON,
TAYLORSVILLE, N. C.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

This book is reverently dedicated to the memory of my sainted mother.

INTRODUCTORY.

A number of the members of the Masonic Fraternity, in North and South Carolina, since the death of my mother, in 1886, have asked me to write and publish a biograpical sketch of her life and let the Masonic world know how she became a Third Degree Mason. I have deferred the work, from time to time, thinking that perhaps I might find "A more convenient season."

Another reason for my delay was that I wanted to talk the matter over with my oldest brother, B. B. Babington, of Shelby, N. C., and get from him some valuable information to aid me in the work; but I received notice, a few days ago, that he had been called from labor to rest and I am now the only living member of the family who can say, from a Masonic standpoint, that my mother, Mrs. Catherine Babington, was a Mason and knew all of Masonry that can be obtained in the Blue Lodge.

The manner in which she obtained her

knowledge of Masonry I give to the world as she told it to myself and others and as it was written to my father by one of her uncles, who was a member of the Lodge where she obtained her Masonic knowledge. The fact that she was bright in the First Three Degrees of Masonry, up to the time of her death, I know to be true. She, herself, taught me much of my lessons when I was being made a Mason. With these few lines of introduction I will proceed to give to the world all that I can remember of my mother's Masonic life and experience, together with what I have heard my father and brother, both of whom were Masons, say. Also many remarks that I have heard other Masons make regarding her knowledge of Masonry.

Hoping that this little pamphlet may prove interesting to the Masonic Fraternity, and the American people in general, I dedicate it to the sacred memory of my beloved mother.

J. P. BABINGTON,

November 1st, 1906.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

The demand for the first edition of the "Biography of Mrs. Catherine Babington" has been such as to cause the author to give the public the second edition, in a revised form, and embrace in it much matter that was omitted from the first.

The appendix of the first edition will be embodied in the first pages of the regular matter of this and all subsequent editions.

The portrait of the subject of the book will also appear in this and all following editions.

The author has also inserted his certificates of Lodge Membership in order that the reader may know that the book is written by a Master Mason, in good and regular standing, in a regularly constituted Lodge.

At the last of the book is added Robert Morris' famous Masonic Poem, "The Level and The Square," which Mrs. Babington loved so well and repeated, from memory, to the author and Dr. J. C. Gidney, her physician, a few days before her death.

PREFACE TO THIRD EDITION.

Since I published the first and second editions of my mother's biography I have met with quite a number of 'Doubting Thomases.'

Some contend that it is impossible for a woman to get possession of the Secrets of Masonry and others have conceived the idea that the publication of the book would damage the cause of Masonry and that it was contrary to Masonic teachings to publish matters of that character.

In regard to the first objection I can say that, while it has always been supposed, by Masons and the world generally, that no woman could become possessed of the Secret Work of Masonry, I know, as a Mason, that my mother knew all of Masonry that can be learned in the Blue Lodge.

As to the second objection my answer is as follows:

First.—In this book there is nothing that

is calculated to enlighten the profane regarding the work of the Order.

Second.—It contains no word or sentence that is not proper to be written.

Third.—Ever since the early ages our brightest Masons have spent years of their lives complying the history of the order, from its foundation until the present time. For more than fifty years those seekers after Masonic History have known, or supposed that one woman in the world had secured the secrets of the order and they labored in vain to locate her. The Biography of my mother is nothing more nor less than a piece of Masonic History and it fills in the link that has long been missing. As such I have given it to the world and I have in my possession, letters from some of the best men and Masons in the United States, thanking me for the work and some of them, who knew my mother, saying I should have put the facts in book form before I did.

With these remarks and explanations I now proceed to put out the third edition and follow it up with others until the demand for the book is fully met.

THE ONE WOMAN MASON OR BIOGRAPHIP OF Mrs. Catherine Babington.

The subject of the following pages was born on the 28th, day of December, in the year of our Lord, One Thousand, Eight Hundred and Fifteen, near Princess Furnace, in Boyd (at that time Greenup) County, Kentucky.

She was the only daughter of Charles and Margaret Sweet. Her parents named her Catherine, but she always answered to the name of Kate. Her father died when she was about six years old and she spent the greater portion of her girlhood and young womanhood at her grandfather's, Benjamin Ulen, who lived but a short distance from the place of her birth.

Her only brother, Benjamin Sweet, is still living at Princess, Boyd Co., Kentucky.

She had six uncles in the Ulen family,

to-wit: Benjamin, Samuel, John, Fredrick, Absalom, and Hamilton.

My recollection is that several of her uncles were physicians and the most of them, if not all, were Masons.

There was but one girl in the Ulen family and she was much older than Kate, therefore Kate grew up the pet and companion of her uncles. She was allowed to go and come when she pleased and usually allowed to do about as she pleased.

Near her grandfather's residence there had been a two-story frame building erected. The first, or lower, story was used for a school house; while the second, or upper, story was intended for a church; but it was never used for church purposes.

The upper room of this building was secured by the Masons and fitted up for a Lodge-room. At one side of the room an old fashioned pulpit had been erected. This pulpit the Masons allowed to remain as it was and Kate's uncles told her, when she went along to help them sweep and clean up the Lodge-room, that they put the goat in it to keep him from running around over the room

when no one was riding him.

As Kate grew up she attended the schools that were taught under the Lodge-room. In playing the old game of "hide and seek" she, with the other children, would often climb up the old scaffolding, that had been left standing at the back of the building, and crawl through an opening in the weatherboarding and hide under the pulpit in the Lodge-room. This opening was back of the pulpit and only allowed a person to get between the floors of the room and pulpit.

As Kate grew to young womanhood and saw her uncles and the other Masons going to the meetings of the Lodge carrying their rifles, for those were the days of Indians and Anti-Masons, her female curiosity was excited and having discovered some cracks under the old pulpit that would make convenient peep holes, she conceived the idea of learning the secrets of Masonry.

In order to carry out her project it was necessary for her to arrive at the Lodge and enter her place of concealment before the arrival of any of the members of the order, for she was well aware that if once discovered,

precautions would be taken to prevent her from repeating the experiment.

The communications of the Lodge were held in the afternoon which made things favorable for her reckless, and almost dangerous, undertaking.

A short time after Kate had fully resolved to become a Mason she heard one of her uncles say, at dinner one day, that the Lodge would meet that evening and a certain young man, who had, more than once, accompanied Kate home from church on Sunday evening, would be on hand to ride the goat and climb the greasy pole. This was enough to work her female curiosity up to the point of recklessness and she determined to see the fun.

As soon as she could get away, after dinner was over, she started off in an opposite direction, and circled around to the rear of the Lodge where she climbed up the scaffolding and hid herself under the old pulpit.

After waiting what, she said, seemed to be almost a half day the members assembled, the Lodge opened and and the fun began.

The young man appeared and Kate watched the proceedings from start to finish. He

was duly initiated into Masonry, and the Lodge, at the same time, unknowingly, revealed the secrets of the First Degree to the first and only female in America who has ever been within the walls of a Masonic Lodge while the members were assembled and the Lodge at work.

Time moves on and Kate says not a word to any one regarding what she had seen and heard. Another day arrives for the Lodge to assemble and Kate is in her place of concealment long before the blowing of the ram's horn. What she had witnessed a month before had only served to still further excite her curiosity and she was now determined to see the show to the end of its final or finishing performance.

Again the candidate appeared and was passed on and duly instructed in the Second Degree of Masonry. Kate, with eyes and ears followed the proceedings and learned as much or more than the candidate.

Thus the secrets of the Fellow Craft, as well as the Entered Apprentice, Mason was revealed to a female.

Now Kate's uncles and the other Masons

in the neighborhood began to talk about the hard time that the young man would have, managing the unruly goat and climbing the pole, when he undertook to secure the mysteries and secrets of the Master Mason's Degree, at the next meeting, a month hence.

The fun they said they would have, put Kate on nettles. She knew that she was liable to be discovered and yet, while she shuddered when she thought of what might happen should her uncles discovered her, she determmined to see the curtain run down on the last act.

The day arrived and Kate was again on hand. The Lodge assembled early and, notwithstanding the awful things that had been hinted to him, the candidate appeared ready, though looking somewhat haggard, to undertake the task of obtaining all the secrets of a Master Mason.

He was brought into the Lodge and none but those who have become Master Masons can have any idea how this young girl, only about sixteen years old, felt as she lay under the old pulpit and witnessed the solemn and impressive ceremonies through which all must

pass in order to receive the Third (Master Masons) Degree in the Blue Lodge.

At last the curtain is run down. The third and last act is ended. John Williams (the author uses the name John Williams because he has forgotten the candidate's real name) is a Master Mason and Catherine Sweet knows all of Blue Lodge Masonry.

Time moves on. The Lodge meets regularly once each month. At every meeting Kate is a silent but close observer of all things done or said. When there are no candidates for the regular degrees the members occupy their time in conferring side degrees. Kate pays strict attention and, in this way she obtains "The Master Mason's Reliance," "The Trader,s Degree," "Master Mason's Wife and Daughter," "The Twelve Tall Cedars of Lebanon" and many others.

In the meantime a noted Masonic Lecturer of the State appears and Kate gets the benefit of his lectures and rehearsals. Thus she becomes as familiar with the workings and secrets of the Blue Lodge as she could have done had she been permitted to take a seat among its members.

But all things must have an end and Kate,s Masonic Lodge attendance came to an abrupt end.

For more than a year she had been an unobserved attendant at all the meetings of the Lodge. She had, on several occasions, run some narrow escapes but a day came when she failed in her calculations.

As before mentioned the members of the Lodge always carried their rifles when they attended the meetings. On this fatal day one of her uncles left his rifle in the anteroom and had gone some distance before he thought of it. He retraced his steps and, as he approached the building, he saw Kate crawling out from her place of concealment. She discovered him about the same time and she knew that a reckoning was at hand. When she reached the ground her uncle told her to return home and go to her room and stay until he came for her.

Upon her uncle's return he called his brothers and they went into their office. After relating what he had seen they decided to call Kate in and find out, if possible, what she had learned about Masonry.

She was summoned to appear for what she thought would be her death sentence, as she had been led to believe that no one was allowed to live who stole the secrets of Masonry.

It was at this time that she showed her courage in a way that probably saved her a vast amount of trouble.

She entered the presence of her uncles, all of whom she knew loved her better than they did their own lives, with a firm step and head erect.

As soon as she was seated the eldest brother became spokesman and the following conversation took place:

UNCLE.—"Kate, tell us where you have been this evening?"

KATE.—"Under the pulpit in the Lodge."

"What were you doing there?"

"Watching and listening."

"Was this your first visit?"

"No sir."

"How long have you been doing this?"

"For a year and a half, or ever since John Williams was initiated."

"Have you been able to learn any of the

secrets of the Lodge?"

"Yes sir. All of them,"

"Well tell us all you know,"

"I will answer all questions you may ask me for I am a Mason and am willing to asswer questions, when properly put to me, but I cannot give you my knowledge of Masonary in any other way."

"Where shall I commence and what kind of questions shall I ask you?"

"Begin at the beginning and ask such questions as you would ask a stranger if you wanted him to prove to you that he was a Mason."

Seeing that she would not impart her Masonic information in any other way or manner the brothers decided that it would be best to put her through the regular catechism which they proceeded to do.

The Masonic reader can understand the looks and feelings of the brothers as the examination proceeded and they discovered that their seventeen year old neice was better versed in the secrets of Free Masonry than either of them.

The trial came to an end when they reach-

ed the point where she revealed to them that she had even caught the words that are spoken, by the Master of the Lodge, when the candidate is finally raised to the Degree of a Master Mason. The pulpit stood near the West and North of the Altar.

After all was over, and Kate told the brothers that no one except themselves knew what she had done, she was confied in her room or closely watched pending the decision of the Lodge as to the proper steps to be taken in her case.

The Master of the Lodge was at once told of what had taken place. Each member was notified of a call communication to be held the next day.

When the Lodge assembled it went into a committee of the whole and, after hours of deliberation. adjourned to meet again the next day.

Messengers were sent out and the oldest and wisest members of other Lodges were called in to consult and advise. Long and earnestly did they discuss the matter, Many different suggestions were made but none seemed practical.

The laws of Masonry, which had been in force ever since the days of King Solomon, said plainly that no woman could be made a Mason. Yet here was a young girl who had all the secrets of Masonary that could be obtained in the Blue Lodge. The question arose "what was to be done?"

Almost a month was consumed, by the Lodge, in discussing the matter and consulting the most learned Masons of the State. At last it was decided that, inasmuch as Kate Sweet had obtained all the secrets of Free Masonry, the only thing that could be done was to obligate her, the regular way, and risk the consequences.

Accordingly a suitable uniform was made, of red flannel, and she was taken to the Lodge, where she was obligated as a regular Mason; but not admittd to membership.

The day she took the obligations was the first and last time that she was ever inside a Masonic Lodge (where she could be seen) while it was at work. She knew Masonry and kept herself posted up until a short time before her death; but never attempted to visit a Lodge.

On one occasion, while the Lodge was considering the matter, her uncles allowed her to take a walk in the grounds near the house. She went out towards a pond, or lake, when she was met by several masked men who halted her and demanded that she tell them what she knew about Masonry. she refused to tell them anything and they told her if she didn't tell they would kill her and throw her body into the lake. Her reply was: "You can kill me but you cannot make me tell anything I know about Masonry." They threatened but she was firm.

The approach of one of her uncles caused the men to take to the woods, and she turned to go back to the house. On meeting her uncle she related what had happened. He asked her if she would not have told rather than let them kill her. Her reply was:

"They might kill me but they could never make me tell anything about Masonry."

After she was obligated she learned that this was a trap set for her and the masked men were Masons and members of the Lodge.

On the 19th, day of October, 1834, Catherine Sweet was married to Benjamin B. Bab-

ington. To them were born eight sons and one daughter. The writer is the youngest and only son now living. The daughter is still living and is now residing in Atlanta, Ga. Four of the eight sons died in infancy and four lived to reach manhood. Three of us became Masons and learned, Masonically, that mother was a bright Mason.

Shortly after my father and mother were married they left Kentucky. My father was a furnace-man and, at that time, engaged in building a ring-pipe hot-blast for smelting furnaces. His work rarely kept him more than a year or two in one place and this necessitated much moving.

Often my father would go to a new place and go to work leaving mother to follow on with the children. In this way she was frequently compelled to take the children and travel for days, by stage or boat, for railroads were few and far apart in those days.

Many times while traveling, with the children as companions, incidents took place where it become necessary for her to use her Masonic knowledge. A few of these I will relate, as she afterwards told them to myself

and brothers.

On one occasion she was traveling, with two children, up the Ohio river. The boat landed at a small town, where she was to stop and complete her journey by stage. The gang plank was thrown out and, as she attempted to go ashore, carrying one child and leading the other, a colored porter accidently ran against her, she lost her balance and fell into the river. carrying the baby with her. As she fell she repeated certain words that are understood only by Master Masons. Instantly three gentlemen, who were standing on the wharf, sprang into the water and the Captain sang out: "Five hundred dollars to the man that will save the lady." The three gentleman saved her and the baby; but as they were Masons and planters the Captain was not required to pay the reward. He held his boat at the wharf for several hours until mother and the children were taken to the hotel, cared for and told himself and the other Masons present how she came in possession of the words she used while falling from the gang-plank.

On another occasion she was traveling,

by stage and boat, to go to father, who was away from home and sick. The stage was behind time and the boat had left the landing. She saw it coming down the river. Calling to the driver to stop, she dismounted and went to the river bank. The stream was broad at that point and the channel was on the opposite side. The distance was too great for her voice to reach the Captian's ear but his eyes saw a sign given and the boat hove to, turned and went back about two miles to the wharf and took her aboard.

Many such incidents as related above occurred as she traveled, from place to place, in Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Virginia, Maryland, Tennessee, Alabama and other States; but I will pass them over by saying that her knowledge of Masonry was only used when she felt that it was absolutely necessary to use it and it never failed to bring the aid or assistance she needed or desired.

When my parents were married father was not a Mason nor did he become one until about 1859. Eight years after I was born. We were then living in Alabama.

For twenty-five years after my parents

were married father did not understand what my mother meant when she said she was a Mason.

A short time after father became a member of the Masonic Fraternity he left Alabama and came to Spartanburg County, South Carolina, to work for the Spartanburg Iron Company, which was operating furnaces at Cowpens and Herrican Shoals (now Clifton) S. C. He left my mother and three of us children to come on later. Well do I remember that trip.

We set out from Morrisville, to travel by stage to Rome, Ga., on Monday evening in January, 1860.

We were two nights and a day making the trip to Rome. During the time the stage turned over and spilt us all out in the mud, but we reached Rome on time and boarded the train that was to take us to a junction at a place called Kinston. Our train got behind and when we arrived at Kinston the other train was gone and we were told that another train would not leave for twelve hours. The little hotel was crowded, the evening was cold and dark as well as rainy. With us was a

gentleman (Dr. Vernon) and his sister who were going through to Spartanburg. My mother asked this gentleman if he was a Mason and, when he said he was not, she told him that he ought to be one as it might serve the party a good turn. He replied that he did not take much stock in secret orders.

My mother saw several gentlemen out on the depot platform and asked the agent if they lived in town. Upon being told that they did she stepped out and either spoke or made a sign. Two of the gentlemen immediately left the others and came to where she stood. She explained the plight we were in and within twenty minutes we were all in a comfortable room at one of the finest private residences in the town. The gentlemen learned that Dr. Vernon and sister were traveling with us, although strangers to my mother, and they were taken along and cared for.

Supper was served and beds furnishd for all; but no pay would be received, not even from Dr. Vernon.

Some eight or ten other gentleman came in and mother was invited into another room where she spent nearly an hour talking (as

we children learned) Masonry.

After this the journey was continued without anything more occurring to call on mother to use her Masonic knowledge; but Dr. Vernon asked her, the next day, if the gentlemen they met were Masons and if it was her knowledge of Masonry that brought them to her assistance. When she told him it all came about by her being acquainted with some Masonic words and signs, he said: "If I live to reach home I will become a Mason if they will take me in." My father, afterwards, assisted in taking him through the Blue Lodge.

Our next move was to Ore Hill, in Chatham County, North Carolina. We went there in November, 1860, and remained in that county until after the close of the civil war. It was at Ore Hill that my father first learned how much of Masonry my mother knew.

(Just here I will say that it was not told, to any one at her old home, except members of the order, that she had obtained the secrets of the Blue Lodge.)

The circumstances, under which he obtained his information of her being a Blue

Lodge Mason, I will describe as fully as possible as it came under my own observation, to a great extent.

The dwelling, in which we lived at Ore Hill, was built upon the brow of a steep hill. Along the front of the second story of this house ran a long piazza, which was reached, in front, by a stairway running up from the front yard. The road that led down from where Siler City now stands ran straight in front of the house for nearly a mile. At the foot of the hill the road forked, one prong leading down by the furnace and the other up by the ore-banks.

On a certain Sunday afternoon, I think it was in August, 1861, father, mother and myself were on the piazza when a gentleman was discovered riding down the road from the direction of Gee's Cross Roads, now Siler City. As he drew nearer mother turned to father and said:

"Babington," she always called him by his surname, "why do you not acknowledge and answer that gentlemans signs?"

"What signs do you refer to?" father replied.

"He has twice given you signs of an Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft and a Master Mason and you have not answered any of them."

"Well," father replied, "if you understand so much about Masonry, perhaps you had better answer the signs he has given."

"With your permission, as Master of the Lodge," she replied, "I will do so."

"As Worshipful Master of Mt. Vernon Lodge No.——, Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons you have my permission to answer any and all signs," he laughingly replied.

Mother answered the signs and I, boy like, tried to see what she did; but I saw nothing that looked like signs to me at that time. Though I did hear father grunt and say: "That is something new to me. You have often said you were a Mason, but I had no idea that you were that bright. I guess this thing will have to be investigated a little."

The gentleman referred to, Mr. William Murdock, late of Salisbury, N. C., and at one time previous to that date, Grand Lecturer of the Grand Lodge of North Carolina, hitched

his horse at the foot of the hill and came up on the piazza. As he approached my father he extended his hand and said:

"My name is Murdock and I suppose I am addressing Mr. Babington."

"Yes sir, Babington is my name," my father replied.

"I am told," said Mr. Murdock, "that you are Master of Mt. Vernon Lodge."

"Yes sir, I have that honor," replied father.

"I called," said Mr. Murdock, "to consult you on a Masonic matter; but I saw something just now that I never expected to see and, before we talk of other matters, I would ask you if you can explain how it happens that this lady, who I take to be Mrs. Babington, happens to be in possession of all the signs of Blue Lodge Masonry?"

"Well sir," father replied, "I suppose we will have to ask her to explain to both of us. She has often told me she was a Mason but I supposed she referred to the Eastern Star and other degrees to which ladies are entitled. I had no idea, until now, that she knew anything about Blue Lodge Masonry."

During this conversation mother had remained silent; but was enjoying the dilemma which father and Mr. Murdock seemed to be in; but finally she remarked:

"If you will both walk inside, where we can talk without Joe hearing us, I think I can satisfy you that I am a Mason and explain to you how and where I was made one."

They went into mother's room and I was left to myself; but, how I did want to get where I could see and hear them.

The necessary explanations were made and I have heard Mr. Murduck say, on several occasions, that mother was fully posted in Masonry.

The last time that I saw my old friend, William Murdock, was in July 1892, several years after I was made a Mason, when I visited him, at his home, in Salisbury, North Carolina. During that visit the incident above related was mentioned and he told me that my mother answered every questien that he asked her as correctly as he ever heard them answered and that she was brighter in Masonic knowledge than nine tenths of the Grand Lecturers that traveled over the states of

North and South Carolina.

After Mr. Murdock's visit my father wrote to one of mother's uncles, who was still living and got a Masonic verification of my mother's statements. This letter came into my possession and I kept it until my office was burned and all of my books and papers destroyed, in Shelby, N. C., on the 29th, day of October, 1888.

Just about the time of Mr. Murdock's visit companies were being formed for the Confederate Army. Many of the members of these companies petitioned Mt. Vernon Lodge for the Degrees in Masonry. I remember, on one occasion, several members of the Lodge assembled at our house, one night, to discuss the advisability of accepting these petitions and making Masons of the soldiers before they left to join the regular army. The news had gone out, among Masons, that mother was up on all the secrets work of the order and she was present at the consultation. Mr. Murdock was also present and he told me during my visit to him above referred to, that mother cautioned the brethren, in strong language, to be careful or they would

make Masons out of men who were not worthy. He also told me that they did not heed her advice and it caused the Lodge much trouble after the war was over. I also heard my father tell mother, when we again lived at Ore Hill in 1872-3, that some of Mt. Vernon's war Masons had proved to be bad material.

She always took a deep interest in the welfare of the order and, on many occasions, during the dark days of the sixties, her advice was sought on questions that were not plainly defined in the Constitution of the order.

In the spring of 1874, I was working on The Western Vindicator, in Newton, N. C., for Major L. P. Erwin, late of Rutherfordton, N. C., when the subject of Masonry came up and I asked him if there was ever a woman in America who knew the secrets of the order? He replied that no woman had ever learned the secrets of the order and never would. I told him that my mother had taken the First Three Degrees in Masonry. He disputed it and we came near having a bloody fight over the matter. Eventually the Major explained himself and we agreed to let

the matter drop.

In June, 1881, I was made a Master Mason in Cleveland Lodge, No. 202, in Shelby, N. C. A few months afterwards Major Erwin took dinner at my house. I managed to leave him and mother by themselves; first asking mother to give the Major a little brushing up on Masonry for I knew that he was somewhat rusty.

When we started back to the office, after dinner, he turned to me and said:

"Babington, do you remember the row that you and I had in Newton?"

I replied that I did.

He looked at me for about a minute and said:

"I have met with many surprises in my life, and I am an old man, but I was never more surprised than I am to-day."

I knew what he meant, but I said: "Old boy, what has happened to cause you such a surprise?" He replied:

"Your mother is the brightest Mason I have ever seen. She has every particle of the Three Degrees at her tongue's end, and I believe she has forgotten more Masonry than

you or I know."

In July, 1877, mother and myself started to cross the mountains, in a buggy, on our way to Kentucky. Our route was through Western North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. On our way two or three incidents occurred that I could not understand until after I became a Mason and mother explained them to me. These I will relate as I saw them.

On our fifth day out we came to the Watauga river, at Elizabethtown, Tenn. The river was swollen from recent rains and I went to where several persons were assembled, in front of a store, and endeavored to get some one to pilot us across, as we had been told that the ford was dangerous. I was unsuccessful and reported the fact to mother. She said we had better wait a while. A minute later a gentleman who was standing in the factory door, two hundred yards away, came towards us as fast as he could walk. He came up to the buggy and asked mother what she would have. She told him that I had tried to get some one to pilot us over the river but had failed. He told us to drive down to the ford and he would get his horse

and guide us across. We crossed the river safely and traveled on for nearly a mile, the gentleman riding on in front. At the top of the hill we came to a house when our guide stopped and told us that we must dine at his house. He put the invitation in a way that we could not refuse and we stopped with him. After dinner he and mother had a long talk and I then knew that it was her knowledge of Masonry that had brought him to our aid.

The next day, when about 25 miles from Bristol, our horse became lame and could not travel. We were strangers, in a strange land, and not over burdened with money, A farmer was ploughing in a field some distance from where we had stopped. Mother asked me to take our drinking cup and bring her some water from a spring we had just passed. When I returned the farmer was coming towards us. He came up and asked what our trouble was? I told him that our horse had become lame and we could not drive him, and that we wanted to go on to Bristol where mother would make the balance of the trip, to Ashland, Ky., by rail and I would return to North Carolina. He examined the horse,

said he could cure the lameness in a day's time and told me, as I was younger than himself, to go and get his horse from the plow, that he was gentle and a good traveler, and I could drive him to Bristol and bring him back the next day. He said he would keep our horse and have him all right for me when I returned. We made the exchange and I returned the next evening and spent the night with our friend. When I got ready to leave I asked him his bill. His reply was:

"Young man, I could not think of charging you anything for what I have done," and added: "While you are not a Mason you have a mother that knows as much about Masonry as any man that I have ever talked to upon the subject."

Mother told me, after I became a Mason, that when she wanted to find a Mason she used signs and words belonging to the various "Side Degrees," to which the female relatives of Master Masons are entitled, and only resorted to "Blue Lodge Masonry" when the others failed, or in cases of extreme necessity. She kept herself well posted on all these degrees, especially the "Eastern Star," "Mas-

ter Masons Wife and Daughter" and "The Heroine of Jericho."

The "Traders Degree" was known by very few women, in her time, yet she knew it perfectly and often used it when occasion demanded.

She often talked to me, during the last years of her life, and told me many little incidents of her experience in Masonry that I can not repeat in these pages; but I found her well posted on all question relating to "Masonic Jurisprudence" or the "Old Landmarks" of the order. In the writings of Rob Morris, both poetry and prose, she took great delight. The poem written by Morris, "We meet upon the Level and we part upon the Square," she repeated, in full, to myself and Dr. J. C. Gidney, of Shelby, N. C., a few days before her labors ceased on earth.

Mother was always pleased to hear of a good working and live Lodge, and she always encouraged the wives, daughters, sisters and mothers of Masons to take the degrees to which they were entitled, and become familiar with them. She took a delight in helping to confer these degrees upon such of the

ladies as would take them.

Often when father would move to a new place and she learned that Masonry was dragging mother would begin to stir them up, and she usually succeeded in getting them to attend the communications of the Lodge and take a deeper interest in its work.

She advocated keeping up the old custom of "refreshments" and often has she succeeded in getting the Lodge, where she lived, to adopt the custom of having their wives and daughters prepare refreshments and accompany the members to a room near the Lodge. Here the ladies would spend the time pleasantly until the Lodge adjourned or called off for refreshments. Then the good things were spread out and a social hour spent that served to make all wish for time to move rapidly until the day arrived for the Lodge to meet again.

In this way she caused more than one Lodge, that had become almost dormant, to revive and become a live, working Lodge.

She invariably encouraged Masons to take one or more good Masonic Journals and keep themselves posted as to what the Order

was doing in other sections of the world. As long as Rob Morris published "The Voice of Masonry" my father was a regular subscriber and mother an earnest reader.

I remember on one occasion Sheriff Pascal, a Past Master of Mt. Vernon Lodge, spent a night at my father's. After supper he and father got to talking about the small amount of interest that many of the members were taking in the Lodge work. After they had discussed the matter for sometime Sheriff Pascal turned to mother and said:

"Mrs. Babington, can you tell us what the trouble is and how we can remedy it?"

"Yes," she replied, "the men you have named never learn anything about Masonry except what they learn in the Lodge. They never see a Masonic book, magazine or paper and therefore never read about what the Order is doing. Have some good paper, devoted to the interests of Free Masonry, circulated among them and you will soon see the good effects."

The Sheriff laughed and said:

"How much Masonic Literature have you read?"

"All that I could get my hands on," was mother's reply.

"Have you read "Morgan," or any other exposure of Masonry?" the Sheriff asked.

"Yes, I have read "Morgan" and all others."

"Well what is your idea of "Morgan?"

"Morgan was a good writer and knew how to write a book that people, who did not understand Masonry, would buy and read; but a man might memorize every word in "Morgan's" book and yet he could never work himself into a properly guarded Lodge. I have seen many "Book Masons" and could always detect them before they had talked Masonry five minutes. Only a few days ago a stranger came along and began to talk to Mr. Babington. I was in the room and they were out on the piazza. They had not talked long until this stranger asked a question that Mr. Babington did not exactly understand. I stepped to the door and said, Babington, you had better be careful for you are talking to a "Book Mason." He then asked the stranger a question that all true Masons can always answer and his answer gave him away at

once. He showed, plainly, that he had never been inside a regular Lodge. "Morgan" told some things; but he did not tell enough to make a man a Mason or enable him to visit a Masonic Lodge."

She was always careful, when among strangers, never to begin a conversation on the subject of Masonry. Nor would she ever make herself known, to a stranger, as a Mason unless it was absolutely necessary.

Until 1869 we usually lived on furnace hills and generally kept a boarding house. I have known men to stay with us for months and attend Lodge meetings, with father; but never learn that mother knew anything about Blue Lodge Masonry.

During the last months of the civil war we lived on a farm, in Chatham County, five miles from Ore Hill, and on the old plank road that led from Fayetteville to Snow Camp. Along this road Wheeler's men passed back and forth and, after Fayetteville fell into the hands of the Union Army, straggling bands of Union soldiers raided that section of country. Father was away from home and mother was left on the farm with myself, a

brother three years older than I was and a negro boy. Everything of value was taken from our neighbors; but, in a way that seemed mysterious to others, mother succeeded in saving everything that belonged to us.

After her death, on June the 28th, 1886, the SHELBY AURORA, Shelby, N. C., which was then published by William H. Miller, an old soldier and a Mason, published the following notice:

"BABINGTON.—An aged and estimable lady, Mrs. Catherine (Sweet) Babington died in Shelby on Monday evening, June the 28th, 1886, and she died, as she lived, a Christian. As the sun was marshaling his golden, crimson and saffron hues in the West and preparing for his departure, her sun set to arise on a fairer shore, and her soul took its flight to a land where there is no night. She was born in Kentucky in 1815, and married in 1834 to B. B. Babington, who died ten years ago. For over a half century she was a gentle and true member of the Methodist church, and frequently expressed in her last illness a willingness to die. At her death she was the only Female Mason in the United States, and

was well versed in the mysterious workings of the Blue Lodge. Having overheard the secrets of Masonry when she was a girl of sixteen years, it was thought best to initiate her as a member and thus prevent any disclosure."

Mr. Miller is still living in Shelby, N. C., as are also other Master Masons, who were acquainted with my mother and also knew my father, two brothers and myself as Masons.

Dear reader I have now fulfilled the labor that circumstances set apart for me. I have given to the Masonic world a short, but, I believe, true and correct account of when and how my mother became a "Blue Lodge Mason" in every sense of the word. That she was a Mason and knew all the workings of the order, from the time the candidate appeared to first enter the Lodge until he came forth a Master Mason, I know of my own knowledge.

I have often seen it stated, in Masonic Journals, that only one woman, in the United States, has ever secured the secrets of Masonry. One or two of these statesments said she lived in Kentucky while others claimed

that she was a native of North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, Tennesse or Virginia. My mother lived in all these States, and was known, among Masons, as a Mason, wherever she happened to live.

For two years I was one of the editors of "TIDINGS FROM THE CRAFT," a Masonic Magazine published by Babington & DeLoach, in Yorkville, S. C., and during that time the Masonic Journals of America were discussing the subject of Female Masonry. For reasons satisfactory to myself I took no part in the discussion; but watched closely to see if any of them succeeded in locating and ascertaining the true name of the only Female Mason in America. This they all failed to do and now, for the first time, the world is publicly informed regarding all the facts of the case together with the real names of all parties concerned, so far as I can remember them.

As above stated my labor, in giving the Masonic Fraternity, and the world generally, a true biography of my mother's Masonic career, is finished and I now lay down my pen and say:

"IT IS FINISHED."

THE LEVEL AND THE SQUARE.—The following lines, by Rob Morris, were repeated, from memory, and the hidden meaning explained, by Mrs. Babington, to Dr. J. C. Gidney and two of her sons, two weeks before her death.

"WE MEET UPON THE LEVEL, AND WE PART UPON THE SQUARE,—
What words of precious meaning those words Masonic are!
Come, let us contemplate them; they are worthy of a thought,—
With the highest and the lowest and the rarest they are fraught.

We meet upon the level, though from every station come—
The King from out his palace and the poor man from his home;
For the one must leave his diadem without the Mason's door,
And the other finds his true respect upon the checkered floor.
We part upon the square, for the world must have its due;
We mingle with its multitude, a cold, unfriendly crew;
But the influence of our gatherings memory is green,
And we long, upon the level, to renew the happy scene.

There's a world where all are equal,—we are
hurrying toward it fast,—
We shall meet upon the level there when the
gates of death are past;
We shall stand before the Orient, and our
Master will be there,
To try the blocks we offer by His own un-
erring square.
We shall meet upon the level there, but never
thence depart;
There's a Mason,—'tis all ready for each
zealous, faithful heart;
There's a Mason and a welcome, and a mul-
titude is there,
Who have met upon the level and been tried
upon the square.
Let us meet upon the level, then, while labor-
ing patient here,—
Let us meet and let us labor, tho' the labor
seem severe.
Already in the western sky the signs bid us
prepare
To gather up our working tools and part upon
the square!
Hands round, ye faithful Ghiblimites, the
bright, fraternal chain;
We part upon the square below to meet in
Heaven again.
O what words of precious meaning those
words Masonic are,—
WE MEET UPON THE LEVEL AND WE PART
UPON THE SQUARE."

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Biography of Mrs. Catherine Babington,